

THE QUIVER

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"She felt strange and desolate amid the twenty noisy girls."—p. 245.

IN DUTY BOUND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MARK WARREN," "DEEPPDALE VICARAGE," "A BRAVE LIFE," ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER XLII.—MR. MUDFORD DETERMINES TO MIND HIS OWN BUSINESS.

THE omnibus that met the three o'clock train came rattling up from the station, and stopped at the door of the ironmonger's residence in the market-place. Forth from it stepped Mr. Mudford,

and entered the house with the meek, subdued air of a man thoroughly and unmistakably hen-pecked.

There was not much fuss made about his coming home, though he had been away a fortnight. But this

was no unusual oversight, so the little man quietly stole up-stairs into his dressing-room. He had barely time to take his comb and brush from his portmanteau, when the door opened, and in walked Mrs. Mudford.

He was glad to see her, of course, but he looked surprised, and as if he had not expected the honour of the visit.

"I hope you are all quite well, my dear," he ventured mildly to observe.

"I don't know about that, Septimius." (The name Mr. Mudford's parents had chosen as most appropriate to him.) "Of course, I don't expect any sympathy; but the treatment we poor women have to go through is astounding!" and the lady raised her eyes to the ceiling.

"Anything fresh, my dear?" inquired her husband, who was brushing his hair at the glass.

"Yes, it is fresh, sir; as you are pleased to use the word, it is quite fresh."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"I mean that your fine friend over there, Horace Vincent, has driven his wife out of house and home."

"My dear, pray speak more respectfully of Mr. Vincent; I assure you he is one of the most excellent young men in the town."

"Of course, because he is exactly to your taste; a man who illtreats his wife is sure to be."

A smile passed over the placid countenance of the ironmonger.

"When you have had the goodness to explain the matter to me, Harriet, perhaps I shall be able to give an opinion."

"Am I not explaining all the time? The poor thing has had no comfort of her life for months past. *I know what she has suffered.*"

Mr. Mudford was silent. He was hunting in the portmanteau for his slippers.

"And now what does he do? He won't allow her a penny of money—not a penny! and he turns her out of her nice home into nasty cheap lodgings kept by a cross old woman, who will tyrannise over her to death."

Mr. Mudford had some difficulty in finding his slippers. When he had succeeded, he said, "It is no business of ours, my dear, what steps Mr. Vincent chooses to take."

"That is just like you—just like a *man*!" cried Mrs. Mudford, lifting up her hands. "You would not care if the poor thing had to beg her bread from door to door."

"My dear, you put an extreme case," said Mr. Mudford, with the utmost mildness and urbanity.

"No, I don't; and if I had not taken pity on the poor thing, and taken her in—"

Mr. Mudford turned round so hastily that his wife was stopped in the middle of her speech.

"What did you say, Harriet?" he asked, with an energy and decision that startled her. "Do you mean to tell me that Mrs. Vincent is here in this house?"

"Why not, pray? Who was to stand by her if I did not?"

"And when did she come?"

"Yesterday."

She was taken by surprise, and a little frightened. Her husband had never looked at her in that way before.

"And against her husband's consent did she come?"

He was standing before her, with an expression of annoyance such as she could hardly have imagined that meek, placid face capable of wearing.

"Was it with his consent or without it, Harriet?"

She was decidedly frightened. She tried to bluster a little, but he silenced her.

"Harriet, I am ashamed of you! No, I will hear no particulars. The squabbles of a husband and wife are no business of mine. But one thing I insist upon—Mrs. Vincent returns home at once."

"It is like your barbarity," she began, in tears.

"Harriet, you are a greater simpleton than I gave you credit for. Where is the girl?"

"Surely, you will let her stay till after dinner."

"Yes, I will do that. I don't wish any one to go away dinnerless. But after dinner she leaves the house."

Mrs. Mudford gave a gulp, as if she were swallowing down her indignation. She was in a difficult position as regarded Ruth.

Ruth, sweet and smiling as ever, was going along the hall to the dining-room, when a large, eager hand closed upon her arm.

"Ruth, my love, come here—come here."

"I think dinner is ready, Mrs. Mudford."

Ruth's appetite was of the most equable kind. Nothing interfered with it.

"No, it isn't for a quarter of an hour yet. Step in here, Ruth. I have something very particular to say."

Ruth, rather disappointed, followed her friend into the breakfast-room.

"My dear," said Mrs. Mudford, sinking into a chair, "I have got such a turn! Oh, dear me! what will become of us?"

Ruth looked alarmed, and anxiously inquired what was the matter.

"Matter enough, my dear! He says you are not to stay longer than after dinner. Did you ever hear of such a proposition?"

Ruth knew perfectly well to whom the pronoun *he* referred. It was the abbreviation by which Mrs. Mudford designated her lord.

Her heart sank within her like a stone. She had not calculated upon this.

She was not ashamed. There was the look of obstinacy called up on her face; but no blush of shame.

"I won't go back!" said she, resolutely; "nothing shall make me!"

"You are quite right, Ruth. I commend your spirit, my dear. If we poor women did not stick up for ourselves now and then, I don't know where we should be," added Mrs. Mudford, in a tone of self-commiseration.

Ruth was silent. Her lips were compressed, and her face was as unrelenting as it could be.

Still, she had no idea what she was to do, or where she was to go. She naturally looked to Mrs. Mudford for some suggestion.

That worthy individual was not long before she made one.

"I know what you must do, my dear. There is but one place where you can go; and I must bundle you off as soon as I can."

"Where is it?" asked Ruth, with some natural anxiety.

"To a friend of mine in the country; she wants a person to be useful. Of course, you have no money, Ruth?" This was said hurriedly.

There was a sound in the passage of the dinner being carried in.

"I have only a few shillings," replied Ruth.

"Ah, well! I won't fail you, my dear. I'll pay your fare, and see you into the train. Trust all to me."

"But where—where?" asked Ruth, still anxiously.

"It is a little village, my dear; but there is a station. The place is called Brook, because of the water. My friend is a maiden lady of the name of Peckit. It will be just the home for you."

Ruth stood irresolute. The society of Miss Peckit did not seem altogether inviting to her.

Should she return home? Oh, no! She was not going to humble herself yet. Horace might miss her, and wonder where she was gone, and be ever so unhappy. That was just what she wanted—to punish Horace.

"There is no time to lose," said Mrs. Mudford, alarmed; "you must be off this afternoon. I will pack your things and do all I can. You will never find a friend like me, not if you looked for her from now till doomsday!"

Ruth made no response to this gush of friendship. She felt uneasy and disappointed; nay, one might go further, and say dismayed.

Brook! The association was of a low damp hamlet, secluded altogether from the world. She liked East Bramley, and did not want to leave it.

"Is there nowhere in the town where I could go?" she asked.

"Not on any account, my dear! Besides, you could not be under your husband's very nose!" replied Mrs. Mudford, whose choice of language was not select. "No, no! Take my advice, and seem as if you were lost to him for ever. It is by far the best way of bringing him to his senses."

At this point in the conversation the dinner-bell rang.

"Ah, we must go! Perhaps you would like not to come to table. Poor dear! you cannot be very hungry after all this."

"Oh, but I am though!" exclaimed Ruth, honestly enough.

At dinner there was a kind of armed neutrality between husband and wife. Mr. Mudford would have liked to say a few stringent words to Ruth, but his wife took care that he should not have the opportunity. The moment the opportunity occurred, she had bundled Ruth out of the room.

"Now, my dear, the omnibus will pick you up at the door. You must make haste."

Ruth moved about in a mechanical, absent kind of manner. She was ill at ease, in spite of the ardent protestations of Mrs. Mudford.

A real friend would have taken the golden opportunity of arresting her steps; a real friend would have held the foolish woman back, ere she took a plunge into those troubled waters. But no such friend was at hand.

Mrs. Mudford was all hurry and importance. She wrote a letter to Miss Peckit for Ruth to take as an introduction; she helped to cram as many clothes as were practicable into her trunk, and promised to send the rest.

"Angelina Peckit is a delightful woman," she said to Ruth as she packed; "just the right person for you to be with. It is quite a providential circumstance that you are able to go."

Ruth silently wiped away a tear. If she had seen the anxious face that was looking from a certain window as, presently, the omnibus rattled by, I think she would have stopped in her career—I think she would have relented. But from the corner where she sat she could see nothing.

Mrs. Mudford was glad. She saw the face, and drew hastily back, lest Horace should catch sight of her, and suspect what she was doing. Not that she was positively wicked: extreme folly may achieve as much mischief as crime.

The omnibus reached the station punctually. There was the usual bustle, the ticket to be taken, the last words to be said; and then Ruth, still mechanical and stolid, and as if in a dream, was whirled off to Brook.

Mrs. Mudford was pleased with her afternoon's work. It got her out of a scrape, and was sure to torment Horace, whom she disliked vehemently, as little minds can dislike. As for Ruth herself, all further responsibility rested with Miss Peckit.

As she turned to leave the station, she came face to face with her husband.

"Dear me, Septimius!" and she looked as guilty and confused as possible; "what are you doing here, I wonder?"

"Just what I think is my duty, Harriet. I am finding out what you have done with Mr. Vincent's wife!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

RUTH'S JOURNEY OVER THE FENS.

It had turned dark and gloomy, and soon it began to rain. Ruth sat and listened to the rain-drops pattering dismally on the glass. She felt dejected, and uncertain as to her future prospects. If not remorseful, she was at least inclined to doubt the soundness of her policy. Only one thought consoled her. "Show a proper spirit, my dear, and he will soon knock under," was Mrs. Mudford's parting exhortation.

Well, she would show a spirit. He should see she was not to be put upon, though she had been a governess.

"If you had been a lady born, he would not have tried it on," again had suggested Mrs. Mudford; "I know the pride of the man."

These speeches, and sundry others of the same nature, were all Ruth had to fall back upon, if we except her native obstinacy.

The journey took four hours, and led across the Fen country. It seemed like going into banishment.

What kind of a person was Miss Peckit? and would her home be a comfortable one? were questions that began to interest Ruth as the four hours drew to an end. She should not like the neighbourhood, that she clearly perceived. Was that dreary little place yonder, all on the flat open, without a tree or undulation, or anything pretty about it—was that Brook?

Yes; the place was Brook. The train stopped and Ruth had to get out. Now she felt desolate indeed.

There was no one to meet her—she had not expected it—but she had Mrs. Mudford's letter in her pocket, and it was the only clue she could hold by in this part of the world.

Did she wish herself safe back in her happy home with her indulgent husband? I think she did. But the spirit of obstinacy had not died out. An inward monitor said to her, "Don't leave the spot where you are until a train comes up by which you can return. Go back, Ruth! Go back!" But obstinacy said, "Brave it out, Ruth, to the end. Don't return to him; let him come to you. Be firm, Ruth! Be firm!"

Ruth was firm. She looked about for some one to carry her luggage.

"I want to find a lady of the name of Peckit," she said.

"Oh, yes—Miss Peckit, you mean. Her as keeps the school."

"Oh, no!" began Ruth, hurriedly.

"There is but one Miss Peckit in the place," said the man, decidedly, as he shouldered the trunk, "and she's kep' a school ever since I can remember."

Ruth's heart sank within her. She had expected to encounter a little dulness and isolation, but the multifarious evils connected with a school were beyond her calculation. She wondered her friend at East Bramley had not apprised her of the fact.

"Be you the new teacher?" asked the man, who was disposed to be communicative.

"I—I don't know," stammered Ruth.

"Ah, you'll not take offence, ma'am. I thought maybe you might have been. She's a rare sight of teachers, has Miss Peckit, only none of 'em stop."

Ruth's heart sank lower and lower. Presently she came in sight of a tall red-brick house, which turned its grim face to the village street. Not that it derived any cheerfulness in consequence. A brick wall shut out every glimpse of the outer world.

The house belonged to Miss Peckit. A brass plate on the door gave this piece of information; also, that Miss Peckit was the proprietress of a select seminary for young ladies.

"It will not be too late, even now, Ruth. Before you take hold of the knocker, before the man has time to set down your luggage, go back, go back!"

"But he will be so triumphant if you do, and use you worse than ever. No, Ruth; be sure you hold out long enough. Be firm, be firm!" so whispered her evil genius. For are not good and evil for ever wrestling which shall gain the mastery over our poor human souls? Does the struggle ever cease but with life?

By this time she had knocked and had been admitted. The servant-girl ushered her into a bare, comfortless room, which felt as if it rarely knew the luxury of a fire. The window looked on a damp bit of ground, called the garden. A cracked piano in the adjoining apartment was going with all its might.

She had not long to wait. Almost directly there came in the proprietress of the establishment, Miss Peckit.

Miss Peckit was scarcely the sort of person to fly to in a situation of such delicacy. She was a hard-featured, dark-browed woman, with a voice as shrill as a clapper. She gave a steady and rather prolonged stare at Ruth through her eye-glass, then she referred to Mrs. Mudford's letter, which was open in her hand.

"I will explain *everything*, my dear," Mrs. Mudford had said, emphatically, as she sat down to write the letter.

The result of the explanation was that Miss Peckit exclaimed, with an abruptness which made Ruth's ears tingle, "What a little goose you were to get married! Ah!" continued she, as Ruth made no reply to this observation, "if every silly girl would take my advice, and do as I do, there would be a vast deal less misery in the world. Do you think I would get married?"

"No, ma'am," replied Ruth, meekly, and feeling

obliged to say something. She was really alarmed at Miss Peckit.

"Well, then, don't talk of marrying, to me," cried Miss Peckit, with excessive shrillness and acrimony. "And now what is your Christian name, pray?"

"Ruth, ma'am."

"Well, Ruth, so you have come to me to be a teacher?"

"I don't know. I was not aware," replied Ruth, uneasily, a host of unpleasant circumstances staring her in the face.

But Miss Peckit did not allow her to finish the sentence. She had a habit of bearing down all before her. Ruth's feeble resistance was but a bridge of straws before a torrent.

"Yes, I want a teacher badly enough; I have been without one for three months. You are come to the right place, Ruth." And she bestowed a grim smile on the foolish woman who had let herself be entrapped.

Ruth again attempted to speak, but without avail; Miss Peckit again bore down upon her.

"I suppose Mrs. Mudford's recommendation will be a sufficient reference. She seems to have known you all your life. You understand music and French, of course?"

"Yes, ma'am; but——"

"And of course you can work with your needle. I shall expect you to take charge of the wardrobes, and also to be with the pupils out of school-hours, and so forth. Well, I think I must make a trial of you."

"But, Miss Peckit——"

"You have good health, I hope. I don't allow holidays; they only unsettle the girls. On my card of terms there is expressed, as no doubt you have seen, *no vacations*."

Ruth had not seen anything of the kind.

"Well, Ruth, you had better take off your bonnet and go into the schoolroom. I will show you the way."

Ruth felt inclined to cry. She was alarmed at being thus caught and caged against her will; and it was hopeless to make Miss Peckit understand how matters really stood. Her head ached. She felt strange and desolate amid the twenty noisy girls, all talking at once, and in whose society she had to spend the evening. And most of all she wondered at the duplicity of her bosom friend, Mrs. Mudford. It was too late to think of taking any steps that night; there was no alternative but to endure the ills into which she had plunged herself until the next day. "Then I will go from here, at all events," thought Ruth, comforting herself with the idea.

But how was she to go? She had no money. Mrs. Mudford had paid for her ticket. Here she was, miles from home, and with a solitary half-crown in her pocket.

Never mind; she would write, not to him—oh, no!—but to her sympathising friend and confidante, Mrs. Mudford.

She would tell her how wretched she was, and that she must come back to East Bramley. Of course, Mrs. Mudford, who professed such ardent zeal for her cause, would forward her a supply; she did not doubt it for a moment.

She scribbled a few hasty lines, and contrived to post them the next day. Her position was quite as disagreeable as she had suspected it would be. Constant and harassing labour, unruly pupils, scanty food, and comfortless lodging, these had Ruth obtained in lieu of the blessings a kind Providence had bestowed upon her. She began to suspect that she had made a mistake. Home seemed invested with new charms. Yes; anything was better than this. She had even relented towards her husband. She thought she would go back to him.

But she must wait for a letter from Mrs. Mudford, and that good lady did not seem in any special hurry to reply to her. A week passed before an answer came. Ruth hurried to her room to read it.

My dear Ruth,—I am glad to hear that you reached Miss Peckit's in safety, and are quite happy under her beneficent wing. No, my dear, I cannot lend you any more money. I hoped you would have sent me a Post-office order for the fourteen shillings and sixpence which I laid down for your ticket. He keeps me so short of cash I have not a penny to spare. Ruth, my dear, you were right to go away, and I would keep away if I were you. He goes about as saucy and smiling as ever. I met him yesterday, and he took off his hat quite jauntily. I never saw him look so well. They say he had a supper-party the night after you were gone—*champagne* and lots of things! They kept it up till one in the morning. Isn't it just like a man!

My poor lamb, do take care of yourself, and don't be writing to him, or doing anything silly! I will let you know all that happens, and how he goes on. Where can you be more safe or more happy than at dear good Miss Peckit's?—I remain,

Your faithful and loving friend,

HARRIET MUDFORD.

Ruth stood looking into the damp little garden, the letter crumpled up in her hand. The sting was not in the withholding of the money, though that would be felt presently. "Smiling and saucy!" Then he did not feel her absence. Oh, no! Of course not! He was glad to get rid of her! Had not Mrs. Mudford said that the removal into lodgings was a trick, because he thought the old servant would save his pocket, and play into his hands?

And a supper-party, too! Yes, he could have his own friends—perhaps that nasty Mrs. Jules, or that stuck-up Miss Easton! How she detested the whole set!

Yes; he could have champagne, and spend his money freely, now she was gone! She never wished for supper-parties; she never asked for champagne!

But she was not allowed to be mistress any longer. Jane Wilson was to be the mistress. Was it likely? and her face grew hard and bitter and

obstinate to the last degree; was it likely she would submit?

Go back! She should think not. She would rather stay here until she died!

Half an hour after, as she was going down-stairs, Miss Peckit passed her.

"Well, Ruth, and are you quite settled?" she stopped to ask.

Ruth had the letter in her pocket. One hand grasped it tightly.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied, "quite!"

(To be continued.)

WORDS IN SEASON.

LOOKING BACK.—I.

BY THE REV. CANON BATEMAN, M.A., VICAR OF MARGATE.

THERE are certain times and certain senses in which it may be said that it is well to *look back*. It is well to look back when we would trace "all the way the Lord our God hath led us in the wilderness." It is well to look back when we would tell "how goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life." It is well to look back when we would learn by the footprints left behind, where we "erred and strayed from God's ways," where "loving correction" met and checked us, and by what paths we were brought again into "the King's highway."

But there are other senses and other times when by *looking back*, the whole of the "life of God in the soul" is imperilled; and it is to these the following remarks have especial reference. They are cautionary, and intended as a "word in season" to the professed people of God—such a word as St. Paul addressed to the Christian Church when, referring to the overthrow of the children of Israel in the wilderness, he says, "These things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Cor. x. 6).

1.—THE TENDENCY TO "LOOK BACK."

There is a strong tendency to this in the human mind. It found expression in Lot's wife. There was nothing in Sodom which ought to have made her "look back." Her husband's righteous soul had been vexed there day by day. The morals of her daughters had been sapped, not to say destroyed in it. The cry of it had waxen great before the Lord, and the sentence of destruction had been pronounced. And yet she "looked back" with a lingering feeling of regret, and would fain have returned.

It found like expression in Demas. He had left the world, and yet he "loved" it. He had been a companion of the apostle in earlier days, but now forsook him. His name had been joined with the brethren in St. Paul's apostolic greetings to the Church at Colosse, to be held up afterwards as a sad warning to Timothy. Persecution had broken out at Rome; perhaps ease and aggrandisement were beckoning him to Thessalonica.

Hence he "looked back," and left the apostle's side.

It found expression, moreover, in the wilderness; when the supply of quails brought at once the relief the people sought, and the punishment they deserved. In this last-mentioned narrative we shall find the best illustration of the tendency under consideration, and upon the details, as recorded in the book of Numbers, the argument will mainly rest.

The children of Israel had left the region round about Mount Sinai; and, marshalled in tribes under appointed leaders, with banners unfurled, and silver trumpets blown, were advancing stage by stage into the wilderness. Whilst thus moving from place to place, and dwelling in tents, their minds became unsettled, and a spirit of discontent arose. It began with the "mixed multitude," who from various causes had come up with them from Egypt. We read (Exod. xii. 37) that "the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about 600,000 on foot that were men, beside children; and a mixed multitude went up also with them." Some of these aliens may have been moved by the conviction that God was on Israel's side; family ties may have bound others; the hope of advantage may have had its effect; whilst the "spoil" of the Egyptians may have had its attractions. With this mixed multitude the complaining began, and it soon spread to the Israelites themselves. There was repining throughout the camp. They loathed "the manna," and longed for the "cucumbers and garlic." Their recent deliverances, their present mercies, their debt of gratitude, God's great goodness—all were forgotten; and nothing was heard but sounds of weeping, clamouring, and rebellion.

No wonder that God's anger was kindled, and that his power was manifested in their punishment. The Psalmist (Ps. lxxviii.) tells us afterwards how "he caused an east wind to blow in the heaven, and by his power he brought in the south wind;" how "he rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea;" how "he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations." "So they did

eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their hearts' desire; they were not disappointed of their lust." And then he tells us how that, "while the meat was yet in their mouths, the heavy wrath of God came upon them, and slew the wealthiest of them; yea, and smote down the chosen men that were in Israel."

The name of the place, says the sacred historian, was called Kibroth-hattaavah (the graves of lust), because there they buried the people that lusted.

The narrative thus briefly touched upon, serves to develop the tendency we are considering. This tendency is common to us all. We see it especially in those who suffer their minds to dwell upon renounced and forbidden gratifications: who turn away their eyes from the Canaan to which they are bound, and look back to Egypt from whence they have been delivered. Under the idea is included all that the apostle calls "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:" for these, he adds, "are not of the Father, but of the world."

As the tendency is common, so is the warning addressed to all bodies of Christian men. Their banners are of many colours, their heraldry is diverse, their trumpets sound various notes, their organisation is sometimes defective, their discipline is often relaxed, their temper and spirit are sadly perverse—but their main object is the same; they are all the professed people of God; they are all journeying unto the place of which the Lord hath said, "I will give it you;" they are all bound for the land of Canaan; they all have their faces Zionward.

Some individuals amongst them, from their earliest infancy, may have been "faithful and beloved," partakers of the benefit. Like Samuel, when a child, they may have heard and responded to God's call: like Timothy, from a child, they may have known the Holy Scriptures; and the rest of their lives may have been according to this beginning. They may have sat at Christ's feet, listened to Christ's words, stood at Christ's cross, confessed Christ's name, and adorned Christ's Gospel. Thus they have escaped the corruption, or much of "the corruption that is in the world through lust." But they would be the very last to stand erect in the Temple on this account and say, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are," and the very first to smite upon the breast and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner:"—the very last to put on the garment of self-righteousness, and the very first to clothe themselves with the "righteousness which is of God by faith:" the very last to speak of the "good heart" and the "pure life" and the "upright purpose" and the "honest intentions," and the very first to say, "It is not I, but the grace of God which is in me."

Grace only maketh men to differ: grace that framed the everlasting covenant ordered in all

things and sure: grace that inclined the soul to its acceptance: grace that unveiled the heinousness of sin: grace that revealed the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord: grace that made faith fruitful: grace that appeared unto all men, and taught them that, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

But it is not often thus, as in the individual case supposed. The constraining, sanctifying, and therefore saving influence of early grace is rare indeed, and precious as rare. Men, for the most part, "burst the bonds and break the yoke." And then they have, one and all, to be brought back again to God, in various ways and by varying instrumentality. Sometimes Christ, walking as it were by the seaside, sees them busily "casting" or "mending" their nets, for they are fishermen. He calls them, and straightway they leave ship, father, and nets, and follow him. Sometimes they are sitting at the receipt of custom, buying and selling and getting gain, labouring for the meat that perisheth, but careless of that which endureth unto everlasting life. Christ passeth by and says, as he said to Matthew, "Follow me:" they immediately leave all and follow him. Sometimes Christ looks up and sees a man, like Zacchæus, in the sycamore-tree, full of curiosity about religion, desiring to know what it really is, but hindered by others of higher stature and greater pretensions; and he bids him "make haste and come down," for he will abide in his house. That curious inquirer makes haste and comes down, and receives him joyfully. Sometimes Christ says, "Who touched me?" when some poor sufferer, her heart sad and her substance wasted, can do nothing but press unnoticed into the crowd, and touch the hem of his garment; which touch brings healing to body and soul. Sometimes to the persecutor who has been breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, he says, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest:" and straightway the man preaches the faith which once he destroyed. Sometimes the heart opens gently to attend to the things spoken: and then the house opens to every one that needeth. Sometimes there is a great cry of, "What must I do to be saved?" and then straightway he that scourged the back washes the feet. Sometimes the chariot, the water, the Word, the minister, and the inquirer are brought together by the Holy Spirit; and then he who "sat uneasily," goes on his way rejoicing. Sometimes assembled multitudes are pricked in the heart; sometimes a solitary Dionysius or Damaris are added to the Lord. Conversion unto God, in any one of these its varied forms, is still the work of grace; the method God employs for building up his Church, and adding to it of "such as shall be saved." And if any reader of

these lines has wandered and strayed from God's ways, and got entangled in some of the many snares set by "the destroyer;" it is in and by this process that he obtains deliverance. He is restored from the "far country" and "the husks," to the "fatted calf" and the "Father's house;" he is brought out of "darkness" into "marvellous light;" he is freed from the "bondage of corruption," and walks in the liberty "wherewith Christ hath made him free."

There may have been nothing very sudden or very striking in the process. The kingdom of God may not have come with observation, so that men cried, "Lo, here," or, "Lo, there;" and yet the work may be truly saving, and the hope really good.

With the hope, however, comes the tendency before us—the tendency to "look back"—the tendency to build again the things we have destroyed

—the tendency to think of, and long for, the flesh-pots of Egypt.

There are various and noteworthy exciting causes in connection with this tendency, which will call for consideration in a second paper. But a short interval may be well employed in self-examination as to our own true state before God. Has grace wrought savingly upon our souls? Have we from our earliest years loved Christ and his service? or can we recall a time when we began to do so? Can we remember when, from caring nothing about religion, loving the world, and lusting after evil things, we were brought to self-knowledge, to conviction of sin, to true repentance, and to the surrender of all to Christ as our Saviour, Lord, and God? These are great topics to ponder on. May the result of self-examination be hopeful and consolatory.

THE RIVER OF LIFE.



RIVER of life, thy waters clear
Flow dark with many a tempest
here;
Through rock-bound valleys cleave their
way,
But ever swell from day to day,
Till, grown into a boundless sea,
They rest them in eternity.

Still ever onward as they roll
They bear the bark of many a soul
Storm-tossed and lightning-veered, which glide,
Hemmed in by fear on every side;
Till, steered by the unseen Pilot's hand,
They anchor by the promised land.

There, on thy tranquil glassy breast,
Circled with glory shall they rest;
Their tenants' labour all is o'er:
Bright as the morn, on that blest shore
They hymn the source of all thy waves,
The wounded side of Him who saves.

River of Life, thus may it be
With us who cast our bark on thee.
O! Endless Mercy, waft our sails
And shield us from o'erwhelming gales.
Eternal Wisdom! shape our course:
Love! tame the raging billows' force,
Till, in thy haven for evermore,
Our need for helm and sail be o'er. J. S. R.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

PART I.



I CAME upon him one sultry day,
when, scorched, thirsty, and covered
with dust, I had left the shadeless
bye-road, crossed some harvest fields,
and plunged among some trees
that seemed "impervious to the noontide ray."
Here, lying on his chest beneath an oak, playing
with a puppy, I found my young gentleman, who
looked up at me, with his limpid blue eyes,
through a heap of flaxen curls, with as much
merriment as shyness. His complete enjoyment
of the present moment almost made me envious.
I sat down beside him.

"What is your name?"

"Robin Doodfellow."

"Ay! Why do they call you so?"

He gave me an intensely droll look.

"Tause I'm a dood boy."

Robin Goodfellow! And was this the tricky
little sprite noted in Fairyland for stealing cream
and spoiling beer, and lurking in village wassail-
bowls in the likeness of a roasted crab-apple?
Had I chanced upon the old original Puck? But
no. He was full of mischief; this one looked full
of grace. He would wantonly mislead belated
travellers, over park, over pale, through bush,
through briar, over hill, over dale, through flood,
through fire; this, if I mistook not, was no fairy
changeling, but a very lovely little English boy,
hardly above the condition of a peasant.

As we exchanged smiling looks without a word



(Drawn by H. PATERSON.)

"Mrs. Thatcher was hanging out clothes to dry."—p. 253

spoken, I bethought me of a small biscuit I had about me, which I handed to him without a word. It was taken in equal silence, and eaten with evident relish, the large blue eyes being fixed on me with gradually increasing amity and approval. But before he had taken more than one bite, he broke off about a third of what remained and gave it to the little dog, whose eager acceptance of the same gave him marked pleasure. Having finished the dainty, he edged nearer to me, and slipped a warm little fat hand into mine.

At this instant a pleasant voice cried, "Robbie, where are you?" and a young woman came through the trees.

Just such a mother as might be expected of such a child. She was fresh from harvesting, and the heat-drops stood on her good-humoured face. There was a strong family likeness between them, though she was tanned many shades darker, and her hair was nut-brown rather than flaxen.

She uttered a soft "oh!" of surprise when she saw me. Robin, meanwhile, got up, toddled towards her, firmly grasped her apron, and looked hard at me and then at her.

"Your little boy and I have been making acquaintance. He says his name is Robin Goodfellow."

"Well, ma'am," and she took him up and kissed him, "the curate who lodges with us calls him so, and we think it a very good name, because he really *is* Robin, and he really *is* good."

Here Robin gave her a hug. "You little coxer," said she, "do you like to hear yourself praised? I hope you don't think I spoil him, ma'am, but I can't help showing that I love him."

"And that makes him love you," said I. "I have seen a picture of Love guiding a lion with a rein of silk."

"That's a pretty thought," said she, "pretty enough for a valentine. And indeed I think it's better, ma'am, to manage children by loving than hitting them. At least I know which I liked best, and I don't believe mother's love did me any harm."

"Mother's love should never do any harm, but a great deal of good," said I, "if it is but well directed. Common sense ought to teach that real love is shown by kindness and firmness, rather than in humouring and giving way."

"Oh, Robbie knows I don't give way," said she. "He marches off to bed as good as gold, without a word or a tear; and if he says, 'May I have this?' and I say, 'No, Robbie,' he never sulks, *do* you, Robbie?" And here a kiss was exchanged.

I left her to her noontide refreshment after a few more words, and parted on very friendly terms with mother and son. Her name, she told me, was Mary Thatcher; her husband worked for Farmer Bent.

A day or two after I came upon her cottage; its small bright casements peering through apple-trees and rose-bushes; beehives under the sweet-briar hedge, a large white cat sleeping in the sun. Mrs. Goodfellow—— Pshaw! Mrs. Thatcher was hanging out clothes to dry; little Robin sat on the doorstep, his arms tightly clasped round a little girl younger and fatter than himself. After a few words of greeting, I said to Mrs. Thatcher, "Is that Robin's sister?"

"Oh, no," said she, "I have but him. That's a neighbour's child, little Mary Perry; they're as fond as brother and sister. He can always stop her crying, and will rock her to sleep without tiring. He can always keep her amused, and that's why her mother says he may well be called Robin Goodfellow."

"You seem to have two very nice rooms at the end of your house."

"Well, ma'am, father left me a little money; and John (that's my husband) thought we could not do better than buy this cottage and build on those two rooms, to let to respectable lodgers. We were very fortunate, for we had scarcely finished them when Mr. Knight the curate took them, and having a few nice things of his own, he saved us some expense in furnishing them. And he's a nice pleasant gentleman, and gives very little trouble, and is always content with my cooking. He's out now, and I should like you just to see his rooms, for most likely he won't be here always."

She stepped forward as she spoke, and opened a half-glazed door directly upon a small, cheerful, neat parlour, with dimity sofa, patchwork arm-chair, a good many books, sundry flower-pots of gay flowers, and something quaint in the general arrangements. I admired it uncommonly, but would not step over the door-sill, though made welcome to do so. Stepping backward, I unawares overset little Robin and his charge, who had silently followed me, and who fell over like a great ball of feathers. Polly cried, but Robin did not; he quieted her with smiles and kisses. I thought what a dear little fellow he was, and that "love in a cottage" need be no fable here, and probably was not.

A week may have passed, and I was taking one of my usual strolls, musing on a very good sermon I had heard on the previous day, which had been full of sound thoughts simply and forcibly expressed. The good old rector, Mr. Browne, had seemed to me to have formed his style and manner on the model left us in the following passage by George Herbert:—"When the country parson preaches," says Herbert, "he obtains attention by every possible art; both by earnestness of speech (it being natural to men to think that where there is much earnestness, there must be

somewhat worth hearing), and by a diligent and busy cast of his eyes on his auditors, letting them know that he marks who observes him and who does not. Sometimes he tells them stories and sayings of others; for country people are thick and heavy, and hard to raise to a point of zeal and fervency, and need a mountain of fire to kindle them; but stories and sayings they will well remember."

I knew that I did, and was quite sure that others did, and I had remarked no heads bowed down with sleep among the homely-looking rustics, though it was afternoon, and they had probably all dined rather more heartily than usual. In the morning a stranger had preached; a young man in deacon's orders, fresh from college, and full of hair-splitting subtleties and invectives against abuses of doctrine and discipline, that our rustics were surely innocent of, and certainly could not understand. I thought it a mistake.

Musing on these matters upon quiet Monday morning, I emerged from the trees and came out on a little hillock sloping somewhat steeply down to a small bright piece of water,

"Where cows might lave and ducks might swim."

On the summit of this hillock I descried the upper half of Robin Goodfellow, sitting with his arms tightly clasped round his fat little playmate. Suddenly she jerked herself from them, rushed forward, and from the manner of her disappearance I was assured that the run had become a roll. Robin looked scared; he stood up for a moment, looking after her, then hastily seating himself, went down after her *en glissade*, the best possible manner, the sun having made the short turf exceedingly slippery.

It gave me a turn. It was no good calling after him—the only thing was to follow as quickly as possible, and see what had become of the children.

As my prophetic soul had told me! The little girl had pitched head foremost into the water; and Robin, having surveyed me in dismay one single moment when she bobbed up again, without a shadow of selfish fear, went in after her. Oh, you darling little fellow! I gave one loud scream, for the chance of its being heard by his mother; and then "followed suit," setting off after him partly running, partly slipping. I did not know the depth of the water, *any more than he did*; but my superior height gave me the advantage of him; besides which I had some presence of mind and common sense. I caught, by a desperate spring, the branch of a tree near the water, and holding it tightly with one hand, stretched out the other to the dear little boy who had got hold of Polly but could not land her. No more could I, though I had clutched the collar of his pinafore, and exclaimed, "Don't be frightened, Robin! Never fear!" on which he gave me such a look!

It was a moment of intense terror. I felt I must let go the branch, which seemed to have a power of its own to wrench itself from me and cast us all adrift.

There was such a ringing in my ears that I could hear nothing else. Suddenly I felt, or heard something, panting close behind me. Was it a great dog? The surprise made me let go the branch.

Then a strong arm seized me; a voice, the kindest I ever heard, said, "Don't be afraid—you are all safe;" and a man gathered the children together with his other arm, and painfully drew us towards the bank. A moment's relief from the extreme tension enabled me to recover myself, and relieve my preserver from half his difficulties. I scrambled from the water, slush, and mud on to the bank, while he drew up the two children, still hugging each other, and Polly awfully crying. Then Robin lifted up his voice and cried too; as well he might!

Our preserver was Mr. Knight; and a true knight he was that day. He said afterwards that my scream had rung through his ears as he sat quietly writing. He now only said, "We had better get them home as fast as we can," and took up Robin, wet to the skin, in his arms, while I followed carrying little Mary. It was hard work with our wet clothes clinging to us, to toil up that slippery hill. Somehow or other, we all got back to the cottage, and the mothers of the two children, all in tears, took them from us and began undressing them to put them to bed. Directly they had taken the children, Mr. Knight turned about and shook hands with me as if he had known me a hundred years, saying with energy, "Miss Rivers, you're a heroine! Pray go home now, and change your dress and take something hot."

Something hot, indeed! when I was all in a glow already. I hurried away, however, with only a bow and smile, for I was unfit to be seen, wet through and muddy nearly to my waist; while carrying little Polly in her drenched state had wetted my upper half too. I hastened away, in a glorious state of excitement; but thinking that if any one were heroic, it was surely Robin Goodfellow. I could not do less than I did, you know; but we should all have been drowned had not Mr. Knight rescued us; and how many men would have heard a distant scream without taking action upon it. I call him *very* heroic.

When my landlady saw my plight, she exclaimed sufficiently; and was very alert, to do her justice, in assisting at my toilette. She would insist, too, on my having some hot wine and water, and wanted me to go to bed; but I preferred resting on the sofa, with a shawl thrown over me.

Next morning, Mr. Knight called to ask how I was; and thought more than I did of my having

taken a slight cold. He chatted very pleasantly about the place and people, and said what good people the Thatchers were. "As for Robin," he said, "he's the prince of good fellows."

"He was quite a little hero," I said.

"He is quite unaware of it," said Mr. Knight. "His only remark was, 'How funny to go to bed in broad daylight!'"

The remainder of my stay at Hedgelands was very pleasant, but did not last long. Then I returned to my uncle's dull old house in the city. There, because I was all by myself all day, and he was asleep all the evening, I lived much in a kind of sombre twilight, and mused a good deal on the Hedgelands place and people, till I came to think it a kind of Arcadia, and the people Arcadians.

I do not like much to look back on that time. My uncle was breaking very fast, yet did not like to own it to himself or others; he was becoming unfit for business, and business was leaving him, but he would not give it up. Nor would he dwell much on the nearness and brightness of a better world. Any allusion to it made him fretful. Thus passed a few dull, sad years, only varied by occasional dull visits to dull watering-places; when a short, sad season of pain and terror made the late dulness seem comfort in comparison. His death was quite sudden at last; he had reposed no confidence in me, nor in any friend.

What salt tears I shed! He had been kind to me, after his manner; had afforded me a home, and was my only relative and protector. His affairs were found in disorder; his will unsigned, though he had left me his residuary legatee. All his property was sold off: there remained to me only my own goods and chattels, and the hundred a-year left to me by my father.

It became a question where I should live. Of course, I decided for the country, both for cheapness and pleasantness. I thought of Hedgelands,

and wrote to Mrs. Thatcher, to ask if any convenient lodgings were obtainable. Her answer, which was curiously spelt and expressed, told me that her own lodgings were vacant, Mr. Knight having gone to a distant cure, and that if I could put up with her poor accommodation, she would thankfully do her best to make me comfortable. I was thankful too, for the terms she named were within my means; and thenceforth I brightened up and took a cheerful view of things. My flitting soon took place; I had but to give a few things away, pack up the rest, and say good-bye to a few who cared for me and a few others who did not. The indifference of these last made me more willing than before to take leave of London for ever, though there are always some attractions in it—books, exhibitions, society, shops.

How peaceful and pleasant I found the Thatchers' cottage! Robin, now a fine boy of seven, with his clean face and pinafore, stood smiling at the gate. Mrs. Thatcher, on hospitable thoughts intent, had set out a pretty country tea-table with new bread, cream, and honey, "just as Mr. Knight used to like it." Mr. Knight had left her several of his belongings—his book-shelves, inkstand, an accordion, which he would send for if he wanted it, and meantime it might amuse their next lodger. An old straw hat hung on his hat-peg, and when Mrs. Thatcher asked what she should do with it, he had gazed on it abstractedly, and said, "I'll let you know."

I soon found myself extremely comfortable, and began to think that in becoming confined within narrow limits, I had had the 'the gain of a loss.' Mrs. Thatcher managed so nicely that I soon found I ordered too much of everything; and as for garden stuff, she would absolutely take nothing for it. I cast about for some means of requiting her, and soon found it in Robin.

(To be concluded.)

THE PRESENT RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN SPAIN.—III.

MADRID is not a city like London, nor even like Paris. An hour's walk will carry you across it in any direction, and once outside the walls, you are in a desert. The country around is desolate and barren; and no pleasant faubourgs, or rich succession of market-gardens and suburban country houses, welcome the traveller to the capital of Spain. The population, is, therefore, essentially a town population, crowded densely together, quick to apprehend and communicate thought, easy to kindle into a political ferment, restricted in its occupations—and all this in addition to the fiery sunshine which constantly adds

fierceness to the naturally rapid current of the Castilian blood.

These points ought to be taken into consideration when arguing from the condition of affairs at Madrid, to the prospects of Protestantism in Spain generally. The same results are scarcely to be looked for elsewhere as have followed the preaching of the Gospel at Madrid during the comparatively short period of nine months. It would be well not to permit one's expectations of the country population to rise too high, lest they should be disappointed.

The Protestants at Madrid as yet possess only one regular church, but arrangements are being

made by which a second church may be opened in another part of the town; and it is quite certain that if three or four churches were opened, they would all be filled to overflowing. The present church is situated in the northern part of the town, at Calle* Madera Baja, No. 8. Previously to obtaining this place of meeting, the Protestants had assembled at 2, La Plaza Catalina, where public worship was first commenced by them on the 24th of January last. This place became quickly much too small for them, and on the 21st of March the present church was opened. It is hardly to be called a church, in the architectural sense of the word, for it has neither chancel, nor nave, nor any of the modern ecclesiastical adjuncts.

We shall have no difficulty in finding our way on Sunday morning to the Protestant Church, if we can only thread the somewhat tortuous maze of streets amongst which the Calle Madera Baja is situated. Half an hour before the service begins, the building, which holds about 800 comfortably, begins to be well filled, and as the hour approaches, every seat and standing-place is occupied, and the door is blockaded by a crowd which reaches into the street, and thus indicates the exact position of the church, without any possibility of mistake. Having come pretty early, and therefore succeeded in obtaining a seat, we find ourselves in a low room nearly square, intersected by plain square pillars, lighted by skylights, and, perhaps capable, under pressure, of having a few more than the ordinary 800 crammed into it. It has once been a printing-office, and is really the basement of a house, which stands over the pillars, with the addition of two small courtyards, which used to exist one on each side of the house, and which have been covered over with glass. This improvised room is furnished with backed benches in parallel rows, and a small portion at one end has been partitioned off to form a vestry. In front of the vestry is a pulpit covered with red cloth, and before the pulpit is an enclosed space for the communion-table. The whole arrangement very much resembles that of the old Nonconformist chapel before the architectural epoch commenced, and is of the simplest possible kind.

The mode of service is borrowed from the French Protestant Church. It commences with singing, and here, of course, there is a difficulty at the outset. The Romish Church has no hymns in which the people can join. It has, no doubt, many glorious compositions which its choirs may perform, and to which the congregations may listen if they please; it has also grand musical performances contributed by the greatest composers, and not unfrequently performed with the aid of full bands and regular conductors. But of

the "hymn," such as the Saviour and his disciples sang together, and such as the early Christians were exhorted to sing, "making melody in the heart to the Lord," and such as German and English Protestants sing, of this the Roman Catholic Church knows nothing. This difficulty has already been to some extent surmounted by the Spanish Protestants, and beautiful it is to hear the united voice of 800 simple-minded believers sing the praises of God and the Saviour as they do in the Protestant Church at Madrid.

The reading of the Ten Commandments, and of the eleventh commandment, as Archbishop Ussher called it,* follows the singing. After this the minister, habited in a black gown and bands, ascends the pulpit, and commences that part of the service which is peculiarly committed to him, and which consists of the reading of the Scriptures, an extempore prayer, a sermon, and a series of liturgical prayers, chiefly translated from the Genevan Church prayers, and including the Apostles' Creed. It must not, however, be supposed that this order is identical throughout the Protestant congregations of Spain. We understand that at Barcelona a form of prayer corresponding to that of the English Church is used, and that at Seville no form at all is in use, but all is purely extempore. Whether any uniform rule will be adopted is at present difficult to decide, but for the sake of avoiding possible future divisions, it is to be hoped that this will, sooner or later, be decided upon.

The ministers in charge of the congregation at the Calle Madera are two, Señors Carrasco and Rouet. Señor Carrasco was originally a companion of Matamoros. Without doubt the spectacle of undaunted fidelity to his belief, which that famous Spanish Protestant exhibited, did much to confirm his follower and companion in their common purpose, and since that time, Señor Carrasco has had the benefit of an excellent training at Geneva, where he received a regular theological education. He is therefore as much qualified by his antecedents and his education, as he is by his natural abilities, for the important position which he now occupies, and the Roman Catholic champions find him a very powerful antagonist. A paper of his, largely circulated in Spain, in answer to the Archbishop of Valladolid's attack on the Protestants, would be well worth perusal in England at this moment, and might be useful even to some of our English friends, who pour contempt on the name of that Protestantism, to which they owe so much of civic liberty, and all which they possess of religious light.

Señor Carrasco's preaching is, as might be expected, of a thoughtful character, and has in it a singular power of satisfying the mind as well

* Calle, street.

* John xiii. 34.

as elevating the emotions. His colleague, Señor Rouet, is of a different temperament, and is rather a rhetorician than a logician.

There is no doubt that the style of prayers adopted by the Spanish Protestants is rather contrary to English tastes. As in the Scotch Church, the people sit down to sing and stand up to pray. But this is not the only point of difference. In England, when addressing the Supreme Being, we usually speak in a solemn tone, on bent knee, and with other external marks of devotion. But the Spanish minister looks with open eyes at the people, flourishes his arms, beats his breast, and delivers the whole prayer in what we should term an exaggerated theatrical manner. In this we should probably not wish to copy our Spanish brethren; neither should we care to do so in having a large black cross stuck up on the wall behind the pulpit.

But it must not be supposed that the ordinary public worship is the only religious ceremonial used in this place, or that the preaching of the Gospel to a large miscellaneous congregation is the only evidence of success. More than 300 names have been already received of those who desire to join themselves professedly and openly to the Protestant Church. A class of young men meets regularly for religious instruction; a

Sunday-school has been recently opened, which already consists of about fifty children, and if it were not for the early hour of the morning (eight a.m.) at which it commences, it would, no doubt, be much more largely attended. The communion of the Lord's Supper is also frequently administered. At the first administration, on Easter Day this year, there were fifty communicants. At Whitsuntide there were eighty-five, and the numbers still go on increasing.

The affairs of this congregation are managed by a committee. In the first instance this committee was self-chosen; but when matters had settled into a more perfect shape, it was thought desirable to leave the election of the committee to the congregation themselves. The congregation have, therefore, elected from their own body a committee, to hold office for one year. At present, this committee have not to find the necessary stipends of their ministers. The stipend of one of them is supplied partly from England, through the Foreign Aid Society, and that of the other from France. But there are, of course, other expenses to be met, and there can be no doubt that if the movement is to succeed as an institution, that the people must be called upon to provide out of their own means for those who minister to their spiritual necessities.

"PENNY'S TOES."

PART II.

"**W**ELL, Penny, what would you like?" said the lady who had taken them out. But Penny hadn't an idea—anything—everything.

"Polly, what would you like?"

Polly thought a bit, and glanced at her little old worn boots, thin in many a place, and letting the icy little feet feel the frozen touch of the snow.

"I should like a new pair of boots, please, ma'am."

"Better than anything else?"

"Ye—s, ma'am, please."

"Come along, then," said the lady; and she and her two small companions entered a shoe-shop, and the lady said to the man who was serving, "I want a pair of strong boots for this little girl."

Polly's face had an awe-struck, intensely serious expression on it, and on the whole she was rather scandalised at Penny's behaviour; for Penny, once feeling pleased and happy, did not fail to show it, and she was smiling from ear to ear in the most ridiculous way, and her eyes sparkling and dancing.

Polly held out her foot, which the bootmaker took in his hand, glancing contemptuously at the poor little old boot which covered it. Very shortly Polly's feet were encased in such a nice, well-made pair of boots that she scarcely knew her own feet again.

Penny fell to admiring Polly's boots, and was much tempted to say she should like a pair also for her present; but she was undecided, and they left the shop.

Penny's eyes now read the announcements in red, blue, and green letters, "Christmas Presents," with great satisfaction, and every window she examined so attentively that she was for ever getting into people's way, and receiving pushes and knocks. At length, however, passing a large grocer's shop, Penny's glance fell on the tempting rows of open boxes of bon-bons and dried fruits.

"Oh—oh!" cried Penny, coming to a full stop, and feasting her eyes on the tempting window.

"Would you like to have one of those boxes?" inquired the lady.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!—please, ma'am, may I?"

And they all entered the shop, Penny with her eyes about twice their usual size, and smiling more than ever.

A big, beautiful box was chosen, and placed, packed in a white paper, in Penny's hands.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" said she again, when she found herself coming out into the street, hugging a delightful round parcel, and knew that she, too, had a Christmas present, like other lucky people.

"Good-bye, children," said their kind friend; "I

hope you like your presents, and that you will spend a merry Christmas and have a happy new year."

The children were rather shy about their thanks, but managed to get out between them that they were very much obliged, and hoped the lady would have a merry Christmas; which being about as much as they could manage, the "new year" was left to take care of itself; and off they scampered as fast as their little feet would carry them, or the crowd of passing people permit.

They tore breathless down their own mews, up the little narrow carpetless staircase, and into the kitchen, where their father and mother were sitting, having just finished dinner.

"What makes you so late?" they began, but the children with one voice, cried, "Mother, mother!" and held up their different parcels.

Polly's boots were first exhibited and admired, then came Penny's beautiful box of bright bon-bons.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Betts.

"Give us a taste, Pen," said her father.

Penny, all important, handed her box round to each in turn, and then such a tasting and nodding of heads went on, that Polly felt a pang of disappointment and envy of her sister's more taking present; she looked rather doubtfully at the little black boots standing on the table.

"Never mind, Polly," said her father, "you chose the most useful present."

After this, Polly cheered up a little, and their father went off on his Hansom, and then they helped their mother in all kinds of little ways until tea-time, when Penny took another peep at her box, and after another taste or two of its contents, she decided upon making up one or two little parcels of the prettiest, biggest sweets, to give her friends for Christmas presents.

Penny and Polly then began to play a game which required a good many sweets, and by-and-by there were only four sweets left.

"Let's put one for father and one for mother on the mantelpiece." It was done, and there remained two sweets in the box.

"Well, we may as well finish it up, and then there will be no bother," said Penny, and immediately she helped herself to one of them, and handed the other, which was a good deal bigger, to Polly. Polly took it, and the pretty and somewhat stained box, was empty!

The little strong boots stood sturdily upon the table, and Penny and Polly looked at them; and over both children came a feeling that Polly had been the wisest.

"Well, Penny, how are you getting on with your sweets?" inquired Mrs. Betts, when bedtime for the twins came. "I dare say the box is pretty near empty now."

"Quite empty, mother," said Penny with a sigh; "but we've put two for father and you on the mantelpiece."

"Well, you haven't been long about it, I must say," said their mother, tucking them up.

"Ah, well! it was very nice, and don't you think mother, little Ben and the rest will be pleased when they open their packets?"

"To be sure they will."

And very soon the children were fast asleep, and the mother still very busy with her preparations for the next day, which was Christmas. She had a little piece of holly, which she broke up, and stuck a little bit here and a little bit there, and all the time the snow was falling silently without.

She worked on in silence, and the children slept soundly. All at once she heard a strange sound in the mews under her window, the peculiar muffled sound of many footsteps in the snow; there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Betts ran hastily downstairs to see who the unexpected visitor could be.

On opening the door she started back in affright. Several men were bearing a shutter, on which was laid her husband.

"Don't be alarmed, missus," said one man, "he has only broken his arm, and shook hisself a bit. Which is the way?"

"This way—this way, oh! make haste, pray!"

And the men stumbled up the little narrow staircase, while Mr. Betts groaned on the shutter. Luckily, a doctor was with them, who had seen the accident and followed to help.

With his help Mr. Betts soon had his arm carefully set, which relieved him very much, and he lay back and listened while the doctor was telling Mrs. Betts how the accident had happened.

He had been driving his Hansom down Oxford Street, when one of the wheels came off, and poor Mr. Betts was thrown with great violence into the road, where it was a mercy he had not been run over; luckily, only his arm had been broken, besides several severe bruises, and he had begged to be brought home, instead of being carried to the hospital.

The noise of the men passing through the kitchen, and their father crying out in pain, had roused the children, and with great astonishment they sat up in bed and wondered what was the matter.

"Your father has broken his arm," said one of the men, leaving the children more bewildered than ever; but presently everything became quieter in the next room, and the children fell asleep just as the waits were beginning to play.

Christmas morning! Not only Christmas morning in the large squares and grand houses; but Christmas morning in the narrow mews, and Christmas morning to Penny and Polly.

The children woke up with an idea that something had happened and gone wrong, or that they had had a bad dream. Soon, however, they learned from their mother that poor father was ill with a broken arm, and again and again they listened

about how he had fallen off the high cab in busy Oxford Street.

It was a melancholy Christmas Day, mother so busy that she had scarcely time to cook the dinner, and father too ill to think about playing with them the romping games he generally did on Christmas Day. Altogether, things were different and dismal, and it wasn't even so nice as an everyday schoolday, as Penny remarked.

Their father's arm was badly broken and took a very, very long time to get well, and the doctor's visits ran away with so much money, that when the holidays were over their mother told Penny and Polly that she could not afford to send them to school again, and that they must stay at home and help her until father's arm got well again.

This was a great disappointment, for they were very fond of their school, where they had so many kind friends and merry companions. Still their father's arm did not get well, partly, the doctor thought, on account of the severe cold and hard frost which had set in.

"Mother, will you buy me a pair of new boots?" said Penny one day; "these are so very old, they are scarcely any use."

"I can't afford it, Penny; it is as much as we can do to live at all," said her mother.

After this Polly was always the one sent on errands and messages, and very seldom Penny stirred from the house, but when she did, her feet became so intensely cold from the snow which the boots could not keep out, that when she came home she would rush to the fire and try to get some warmth into her toes. In consequence of this she had three or four very bad chilblains on her feet, which broke and became very painful, just as her father's arm began to get better.

At length Mr. Betts's arm got well enough to allow him to go out again with his Hansom, which had been mended; and things began to look up in the humble little home once more, and Polly was sent to school again, but poor Penny's toes were so bad that for a whole month she had to stay at home.

One day, when Polly was at school, Penny discovered on the mantelpiece two forgotten sweets, which had been placed there on Christmas Eve for father and mother. This sight reminded her of their Christmas presents, and of the one she had chosen, and bursting into tears, she said, "Oh, mother, I do wish I had chosen a pair of boots like Polly, and then I should have been at school now."

While she was speaking Polly came running up the little staircase home from school, but with a very flushed face. Close behind her, footsteps were heard coming up. "Mother! mother!" she cried,—"here's the lady from school come: the lady that gave us our presents at Christmas."

Mrs. Betts curtseyed to her, and then the lady went up to Penny, saying, "Well, Penny, I have missed

you from school, but Polly has been telling me all about your chilblains; I suppose you couldn't get on any boots at all now?"

"No, ma'am. Mother got me a pair yesterday, but they hurt my feet so that I cannot keep them on."

"Then I suppose you wished you had chosen a pair of boots for your Christmas present?"

"Ye—es, ma'am." And poor little Penny's voice was trembling very much.

"Never mind, Penny," said the lady; "it may have been a little mistake, and you will know better in future; but you felt in what you chose what Polly did not—the blessedness of giving. I will send you a pair of boots this evening which will not hurt your feet." And then, after having the whole story of Mr. Betts's illness related to her, the lady departed, leaving Penny very happy.

That evening came a footman to the little house in the mews. He left there a parcel, which Mrs. Betts carefully unfastened with one of the children on each side of her.

Inside the parcel was discovered, first of all, a soft, neat little pair of felt boots, directed "Penny," and secondly, a little round box of bonbons, directed "Polly."

Polly danced about for joy, and so did Penny, almost forgetful of her chilblains and tender feet, and they went to bed feeling they had nothing left to wish for.

The very next morning Penny, in her felt boots, walked bravely to school, with Polly offering her bonbons beside her. And although her feet were soon quite well, she has never forgotten those Christmas presents, and her little mistake.

J. H.

"THE QUIVER" BIBLE CLASS.

120. A warrior who fought so long and desperately that his hand clave to the hilt of his sword.

121. Find out how long Noah was in the ark.

122. What inheritance had the children of Caleb?

123. Fire, at the touch of a staff, rose out of a rock and consumed a feast.

124. Thirty neighbouring cities were ruled over by thirty brothers.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 224.

110. Ezek. xlviii. 35.

111. Jer. xlv. 5.

112. Thirty (Jer. xxxviii. 10).

113. Isa. viii. 6.

114. 2. Chron. xxx. 10.

115. Because "God moved them to depart" (2 Chron. xviii. 31).

116. When the voice of united praise was heard (2 Chron. v. 13).